

342/3 Lect. A: Prose Fiction Workshop

Tuesday and Thursday 11:45-13:00 (2017-2018)

Instructor: Terry Byrnes

English 342 is a workshop in the writing of prose fiction. The term “prose fiction” covers a variety of forms, from the one-line joke and the anecdote to the novel “cycle” of several volumes. However, we will probably be concentrating on the short story—while being completely open to the writing and discussion of longer (and shorter) forms, and those kinds of story that fall under the loose heading of “experimental.”

The workshop's method is group discussion of students' work, directed reading, and, occasionally, assignments. Although the discussions are typically free flowing, some patterns will probably emerge. For instance, we will often discuss character, form, and narrative development, and then compare our reading of the story with the writer's intentions, evaluating the techniques used to achieve those intentions. When it's useful, we'll also read and discuss published stories.

There are no formulas (though there are some useful guidelines) for writing successful fiction. However, learning to write well always requires: reading (widely, in fiction and non-fiction); writing failed or incomplete stories (alas, novels, too) as well as successful ones; rewriting; and, in our case, the presentation of written work for class discussion. The class will advise, criticize, support, and offer suggestions for rewriting in an attempt to make the trial-and-error process of learning to write a little more efficient and rewarding. Since most writers are interested in publishing their work we'll also be mindful of the relationship(s) between writer and reader (or markets), of the qualities that can make fiction publishable, and of the machinery of publication in digital and conventional (i.e. paper) forms.

We will likely encounter some of the thorny questions that currently surround all forms of artistic representation. These run the gamut from the ethics of “cultural appropriation” to the use of pronouns that indicate gender. It's important to keep in mind that any position we hold on these matters is to be supported with reasoned argument and respectful presentation.

Workshop Procedure

You are responsible for copying, collating, and distributing your work to the class. One class period (or more) after your work has been distributed, it will be discussed. It's essential that you read all work carefully (at least once) before we discuss it. Electronic distribution of the work through Moodle may also be possible.

Stories are submitted on a schedule that students will sign up for. The signup sheet will be distributed in class.

Requirements

- 1) The completion of a *minimum* of 40 double-spaced pages (or 20 single-spaced pages, or about 11,000 words) of original fiction. This total includes:
 - at least 2 pieces of original fiction
 - submission of at least one rewrite following class discussion (This is in addition to the minimum of 2 required stories). A substantial rewrite may significantly improve your grade because it reveals your understanding of narrative problems and solutions.
 - all class assignments (if any)
- 2) Written comments submitted to the authors of all stories
- 3) Class attendance and participation
- 4) The submission (at the end of each term) of a list of all the fiction and non-fiction you've read in connection with this class and a list of all stories for which you have supplied written

comments to the authors

Evaluation

Individual stories will not receive grades. They will be discussed in the workshop and the author will receive written comments from me and from members of the workshop. If you'd like additional feedback, see me. Always feel free to return to a point you don't understand.

The completion of 40 pages (10,000 words) of fiction is the *minimum requirement* for receiving a passing grade. The determination of your final grade will reflect the following: your original fiction (including grammar and manuscript preparation); improvement throughout the year; participation (includes written feedback, participation, *and* punctuality). *There is no portfolio requirement for this class.*

Because class attendance is essential and required, absences will affect your final grade in this manner: if you miss more than 4 classes throughout the year, your grade will be decreased by 1/3 of a letter grade for each *additional* absence. For instance, if the grade based on quality of writing and participation is B+, but you have 5 absences, the final grade will be B. Six absences will drop it to B-, 7 absences to C+, and so on.

Important Notes and Due Dates

Since your fiction is an essential component of the work that serves as our "textbook," it must be submitted during the life of the class according to a sign-up schedule that will be circulated in the first few weeks of class. *Work submitted after the last class to satisfy page requirements will not be accepted.* If you have already satisfied the page requirement by this time, you may continue to submit work (for my feedback only) for a reasonable period after the last class. If you submit a story for class discussion and cannot attend the class for which your story is scheduled, it is your responsibility to let me know as soon as you can.

Manuscript Preparation

Manuscripts must be submitted in a way that's consistent with the way printed fiction is conventionally formatted, i.e. with paragraph indentations, no extra space between paragraphs, paginated, name of author, date, *and word count*. If you do use a personal method of laying out your pages, be prepared to justify it. Standard usage is transparent; exceptions compete for the eye's attention and become an element of the narrative itself.

Texts

There are no required textbooks for this class, though I recommend you read widely. I also have a collection of fiction anthologies and I'm happy to loan these books.

Office Hours/Contact

Tuesday and Thursday after class, sometimes before class, or by appointment.

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